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ABSTRACT

A review of the literature of second language teaching suggests that a significant gap exists between linguistic theory and language teaching practice. However, psycholinguistics has influenced development of language teaching policies to the extent that many language teachers have advanced a more semantic, social, and communicative view of language. An extension of this approach suggests that reading for pleasure from appropriate second language (L2) texts provides subconscious and progressively more difficult L2 input much like that essential for native language (L1) acquisition. The process is enhanced, it is proposed, by the interest and pleasure engendered by the texts. This hypothesis is supported by psychological principles of learning. The L1=L2 hypothesis suggests that L2 learning, like L1 acquisition, follows a highly predictable pattern. It is concluded that if the conditions of L1 acquisition are approximated by extensive L2 reading (i.e., substantial unconscious, comprehensible input), the L2 learner can achieve a native-like communicative competence in a formal instructional setting. A 37-item bibliography is included. (MSE)

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The Concept of Extensive Reading in the Light of the $L_1 = L_2$ Hypothesis

In this paper I have tried first to show, through the review of literature, the big gap existing between linguistic theories and language teaching practices. Then drawing upon some learning principles, agreed upon by psychologists, I have sought to argue that extensive reading in the target language of appropriate novels and short stories, in terms of the adult learner's language praficiency and areas of interest, helps a lot, by providing for subconscious acquisition of the L_2 and rendering the learning task immensely pleasurable, the process of the L_2 learning approximate that of child language acquisition, hence a valuable means of affording the adult language learner the opportunity of achieving a native - like communicative competence in tutored settings.

1.1. Introduction

Language teaching profession is beset by a number of terminologies such as ' Second Language', ' foreign language', source language', 'L_1 and L_2', some of which have by no means been used consistently by the authors addressing themselves to certain issues in various disciplines, such as translation, contrastive studies, or language instruction. The term ' target language', for instance, implies two different meanings in the studies concerning translation and contrastive linguistics. While the same term means L_1 in the discussions of translation activities, it carries the meaning of L_2 in contrastive studies. Nevertheless, authors of language pedagogy, determined to clear the ground, seem to be opting for'L_1 vs L_2' in contrastive studies, ' source language vs target language' in the translation discussions, and 'first language vs second language' in pedagogical arguments.

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In an attempt to put our house in good order, we may point out still another 'grey area' which exists between the terms of ' learning' and ' acquiring' a language as it is the issue bearing on the topic of this thesis.

Authors writing on language instruction have used these two terms in the ways far from being consistent (H.D. Brown (1980) ; H.H.Stern (1984);R. Ellis (1986)). Whereas some of them have made a distinction between 'acquisition' and learning, using the former to refer to picking up a second language through exposure, and 'Learning' to refer to the conscious study of a second language, others have used the two terms interchangeably, irrespective of whether conscious or subconscious learning processes are involved. Bearing in mind what is said above, we are not surprised to hear Ellis say: " I shall use ' acquisition ' and 'learning' interchangeably --- If I wish to use either of these terms with a more specific meaning, they will be italicized and their reference made explicit" (1986:6). Stern, too, finds this terminological distinction questionable, treating ' Language learning', 'language development' and ' language acquisition' synonymous. "We regard the use of the term 'language acquisition as of no theoretical significance and treat it as a purely stylistic alternative to language learning" (Stern,1984:19). Thus he subsumes under the concept of 'Language learning' first or second language ' acquistition' or ' learning' .* Until 1970 the term 'second language acquisition' was generally understood to refer to the subconscious or conscious process by which a language other than the mother tongue is learned in a natural or a tutored setting. Since then the term 'language acquisition', due to Stephan Krashen's influence (1978,1981), has taken on a

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* In this paper we have overlooked the distinction made between the second and foreign language.

special meaning, contrasted with 'Language learning'.

It is worth noting that the confusion concerning the use of these two terms is because of the fact that there is lack of consensus among psychologists and linguists on what constitutes learning. The process of language acquisition in the child has been viewed by some theorists as a biological process of growth and maturation rather than as one of social learning and deliberate teaching.

In this paper we have observed the distinction made by Krashen between 'acquisition'' and 'learning' and have used the former to describe second/foreign language learning which is analogous to the way in which a child acquires his first language and the latter, i.e. learning, as conscious language development in formal classroom settings. In the first sense, the analogy is sought in the second language learner's engagement in extensive reading of appropriate language extracts- pieces of the English classics and short stories - which being within his language proficiency and interests provide for the L_2 learner's subconscious interaction with the printed text ensuring an efficient, rapid, less expensive and less tedious second language acquisition via, in Krashen's words, "comprehensibl input".

1.2. Discrepancy Between Theory and Practice

Writers on language pedagogy have long been aware of discrepancy between theory and practice. Their efforts at healing the rift are reflected in almost any book which has taken up the theoretical and practical issues in second language instruction. One of the main problems which these writers have tried to contend with have been the continuous changes in the language sciences themselves. Far from unifying theory and practice, these changes have made it

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evident that there is a big gap in between them.

Theory is implicit in the practice of language teaching. It reveals itself in the assumptions underlying practice in the planning of a course of study, in the routines of the classroom and in the value judgements about language teaching. A cursory look at the papers presented in conferences and discussions on professional problems indicate that there is no shortage of opinions and ideas and with regard to the extensive literature on language teaching one cannot help but sharing Stern's view (1984:24) '" .... A demand for more theorizing is hardly necessary because there is so much of it already. Indeed, much of this theorizing has not been very productive. A rapid look at perennial complaints about the unsatisfactory state of language teaching, about its ineffectiveness, about the vain search for a panacea and about the disappointment and resentment expressed by unsuccessful learners requires a genuine shift in thought or emphasis in language teaching."

Because of unresolved issues in linguistic theories foreign language pedagogy has been afflicted with uncertainty which has been glaring us in the face for almost forty years since structuralism in linguistics and behaviourism in psychology were brought down from their pedestal of worship. In hindsight, we find out that first it was suggested the transformational grammar has important insights for applied linguistics (James, 1969); then it is argued that it is a complete failure in language teaching (Johnson, 1969; Lamendella, 1969). First, language teachers are told that pattern practice is indispensible in language pedagogy and that there is no opposition between it and trans - formational grammar after all(T.C. Brown,1969); then it is said that the concept of patterning in language is not adequate to account for many facts about the grammar of natural languages (Chomsky, 1964). Some writers assume

that first language acquisition and second language learning are analogous (not to mention the lack of consensus on the verbal labelling of ' acquisition! and'Learning'among the pedagogues) and that the second language learner should be exposed to unrestricted input of grammatical and ungrammatical sentences. (Cooper, 1970; Corder,1967;Ross,1972); while others are of the opinion that the child's and adult strategies in language learning are far from being similar (Rivers,1964; Ausubel,1964; Cook,1969). In contrastive studies one of the hypotheses argues that learners with different mother tongues learn L_2 in different ways; then we are faced with a challenging view which, encouraged by research in L_1 acquisition (Klima and Bellugi,1966; R. Brown,1973), hypothesizes that all learners, irrespective of their L_1, learn the grammar of L_2 in a fixed order. Again in contrastive linguistics, we are told that the prime cause, or even the sole cause of difficulty and error in foreign language learning is interference coming from the learners' native language and that contrastive analysis has one hundred percent predictive reliability (Lee, 1968:186), then the weak version of the contrastive analysis hypothesis (not to mention the moderate version by Oller and Ziahosseiny(1970), is offered to the indication that the only version of contrastive analysis that has validity at all is the a aposteriori version,i.e.the role of contrastive analysis should be explanatory, restricted to the recurrent problem areas as revealed by error analysis, rather than the a apriori or predictive version (Whitman and Jakson,1972; Gradman,1971,among others).

Traditional error analysis, based on collection of common errors and their taxonomic classification into categories, was concieved and performed for its 'feed back' value in designing pedagogical materials and strategies. Errors in this approach were a sign that the learner had not yet mastered

the rules he had been taught. Later in the reorientation of error analysis, it was argued that errors were no more than deviations in the second language learner's approximation to the target language and that deviations as such, not only inevitable but also necessary, yield valuable insights into the nature of language- learning strategies, hypotheses employed by the learner, and the nature of the intermediate functional communicative systems (Corder, 1967,1974; Strevens, 1970;Richards 1971a,1971b).

At the risk of belaboring the point, I may mention one more controversial issue to the effect that language teaching materials, as some research workers contend , should reflect the sequence of approximative systems of the learner to the point of actually teaching incorrect forms (Nickel, 1973). In the meantime we still remember some autbors, mostly proponent of structural linguistics, giving the language teacher a piece of their mind as to how to go ahead with the notions such as selection, gradation, and presentation of teaching materials, the rationale of which goes against both Nickel's suggestion and also the later creative construction hypotheses advanced by the Chomskian school of thought.

All this suffice to say that language teaching theory has been strongly affected and , at a certain stage, even thrown into confusion by various developments in linguistics. Disenchanted with the contributions of linguistic theories to language teaching, especially after the generative grammars had to run the gauntlet of harsh criticism first by generative semanticians, mostly Chomsky's his own students, and later by pragmalinguists, language teachers (or in Stern's Words 'educational linguists') opted for psycholinguisics rather than linguistics for making language teaching policies while advocating free and intimate atmosphere of

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classroom situations. This new generation of educational linguists(mostly British scholars such as Widdowson, Wilkins, Candlin, Strevens, to name only a few) waited no longer for the pronouncements of theoratical linguists to course their way out of the theoretical confusion to a safty island of language pedagogy; instead, they used their own judgment and initiative in giving language pedagogy the linguistic direction they regarded necessary; namely from about 1970, they took a lead in advancing a more semantic, more social or more communicative view of language, helping language pedagogy run ahead of linguistic theory.

With regard to the interplay between theory and practice in foreign language pedagogy and following the initiative of the educational linguists, we propose that extensive reading or reading for pleasure of appropriate language extracts, preferably English novels and short stories, original or adapted in terms of the learner's language proficiency and areas of interest, is a most reliable and efficient means of acting up to the tenets of semantic/ pragmatic- oriented language pedagogy. More specifically, this paper seeks to draw a parrallel between child language acquisition and second language learning known as $L_1 = L_2$ hypothesis and argue that reading extensively pleasurable novels, short stories, plays, biographies ,... provides for the subconscious intake of foreign language through interaction with the printed text, the impetus for the whole process of this incidental learning being supplied by a high degree of metivation invoked by fascination for the episodes of various tastes and colors in the literary work.

To do justice to the theme of this paper, we need first to tap on some psychological principles in support of the proposed approach and then consider the function of extensive reading in the light of the $L_1=L_2$ hypotheses.

1.3 Psychological Evidence : The Rationale behind Extensive Reading

Knowledge about the learner and learning is relevant to making decisions about optimum conditions for learning. Unfortunately, the clarity and precision of psychological knowledge in the educational process in general and foreign Language teaching in particular leaves much to be desired. The confusion in the field is due to the fact that there is no coherent theory which encompasses consistently all aspects of learning. There are many theories of learning,but as Hilda Taba (1962) has pointed out," ...each theory seems to be derived from a close study of single type of learning, yet the findings from these specific types of learning are applied to all types of learning "(p.78). The few empirical laws which exist are limited to the lowest levels of learning such as thinking, attitudes, and cognitive styles that the learners bring to bear on the learning task. Bruner (1960) has stated that experimental psychology of learning tend to be more concerned with the precise details of learning in rather short- term situations and consequently the psychology of learning has lost contact with long- term of educational effects of learning(p.4). Nevertheless, there are, despite the many controversial issues, learning principles which theories agree (Hilgard and Bower, 1966; Hilda Taba, 1962; Porter,1970).

*Because of the space limitation we are only citing some of the psychological principles which can be argued to provide the rationale behind extensive reading as a means of ensuring successful mastery of the foreign language specially in tutored settings.**

** The present paper is the condensed form of the original one written in 45 pages which carry a detailed discussion of the supporting psychological -*

- *A motivated learner acquires what he learns more readily than one who is not motivated.*

- *Meaningful materials and tasks are learned more readily than materials and tasks not understood by the learner.*

- *language teachers still depend very heavily on the intuitive interpretations that the teacher has to make about learning.*

- *the learner's abilities are important and provisions have to be made accordingly.*

1.4 . Extensive Reading and the $L_1 = L_2$ Hypothesis

In this section of the paper , we would like to first offer a definition of extensive reading and then discuss it from the perspective of the natural approach to language acquisition.

— *principles and some other relevant issues of reading and language learning.*

Extensive reading means reading in quantity and in order to gain a general understanding of what is read. It is intended to develop good reading habits, to build up knowledge of vocabulary and structure, and to encourage a liking for reading (Langman Dictionary of applied Linguistics, 1985). For extensive reading, students work entirely on their own, reading many pages of connected discourse, graded to their personal level of achievements. What the learner needs is a wide choice of reading materials which fits not only his vocabulary, but also his interests. These interests will depend on his age, his sex, his surroundings, his past experiences, his attitudes and his ambitions. "The more emotion the reading arouses, the deeper the impression on the learner and the longer will he remember and more quickly the stories and their language" (Mackey,1966:328). Engaged in extensive reading, the student reads comfortably without having a feeling of conscious strain so that he can concentrate on the message without being aware of the code . At lower levels, the students progress through a series of increasingly difficult levels of reading materials and they encounter in new contexts the structures and vocabulary which they have been studying. At a more advanced level, the students are exposed to unstructured materials which offer them the opportunity to " sink their teeth into something other than baby food", to use K. Chastain's words (1971:177), though care should be taken that the students are not required to read materials which are conceptually incomprehensible and linguistically too complicated for their level of language ability. Extensive reading assignments which generate into ' thumbing' goes against the grain of reading for pleasure.

1.5 The L_1=..L_2 Hypothesis

Almost every practitioner in the foreign language pedagogy subscribes to the notion that second language acquisition (SLA) is a complex process, involving interrelated factors and that there is no single way in which learners acquire a knowledge of second language. Nevertheless, the study of SLA assumes that there are, despite variability and individuality of language learning, relatively stable and hence generalizable aspects to all learners.

Studies on error analysis (such as the ones conducted by Dulay and Burt (1973; 1974a) revealed that a large proportion of grammatical errors could not be explained by L_1 interference. The errors, left unaccounted , led the researchers to a consideration of the possibility that L_2 learners followed a universal route in acquiring an L_2. This possibility was encouraged by research in L_1 acquisition which showed that children learning their mother tongue followed a high predictable route in the acquisition of structures such as negatives and interrogatives (Klima and Bellugi, 1966) and a range of grammatical morphemes (R. Brown,1973). This notion was extrapolated to second language acquisition and it was hypothesized that SLA, too, followed a natural sequence of development, and that all L_2 learners, irrespective of their L_1 , learnt the grammar of the L_2 in a fixed order.

The L_1= L_2 hypothesis states that L_1 acquisition and the processes of SLA are very similar as a result of the strategies the learner employs. This issue was investigated in two different ways : The analysis of the L_2 learner's errors (S.P. Corder, 1974), and the longitudinal studies of L_2 learners (Hatch,1978a), both of which showed that there were striking similarities in the ways in which different learners learnt an L_2. This prompted the researchers to advance the hypothesis that SLA followed a natural sequence similar to that through which

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children acquire their mother tongue, and that SLA was a series of evolving systems which comprised the interlanguage continuum. Each system was considered to be internally consistent in the sense that it was rule-governed. It was also permeable to new rules and , therefore , dynamic. This continuum was initially viewed primarily as a restructuring continuum stretching from the learner's L_1 to the target language. Later it was viewed as a recreation continuum in which the learners gradually added to the complexity of intrim system.

It was rightly pointed out that SLA can take place when the learner has access to L_2 input, though it is controversial whether the input shapes and controls learning or is just a trigger. Researchers, in their attempt to find an answer to this question, have expressed three different views. The early theories, based on the notion of habit - formation through practice and rein forcement, held that learning consisted of building up chains of stimulus-response links and that there were little room for active processing by the learner. In a nutshell, language learning first or second, according to this behavoristic view, was not an internal phenomenon. In the 1960s this view of learning was challenged by chomsky, who emphasized that the learner's language acquisition device (LAD) was responsible for working on the input and converting it into a form that the learner could store and handle in production. According to this nativist view, input serves merely as a trigger to activate the device.

The third view treats the acquisition of language as the result of an interaction between the learner's mental abilities and the linguistic environment . According to this interactionist view, the learner's processing mechanisms both determine and are determined by the nature of the input. While the role

of input in the process of SLA remains a moot point in current research, we would like to side with Krashen (1981a), who considers language input simply a matter of " comprehensible input', providing learners with language" that they can understand, and I may add, the language which affords them a great deal of pleasure to interact with.

Researchers in their attempt to identify some of the processes that are responsible for interlanguage development have sought to find answers to two questions: 1) Is there a natural route of development in SLA ?;2) Is this route the same or different from that reported in L_1 acquisition ? Both cross- sectional and longitudinal studies provide evidence to show that L_2 learners, despite minor differences observed as a result of the learner's L_1 , maturational facts and some cognitive processes, follow broadly similar routes, but the order of development varies in detail. Put in other words , SLA is characterized by a natural sequence of development (i.e. broad stages that both L_1 learner and L_2 learner pass through), but a different order of development(some steps are left out, or specific morphological features are learnt in a different order). Due to the impact of nativist theory in linguistios and mentalistic views in psychology it has become generally accepted that the human language faculty is a potent force in language acquisition, hence similar processes operating in both types of acquisition.

It is reasonable to deduce from discussions in text linguistics, discourse analysis, and theories of language use that language development should be considered in terms of how the learner discovers the meaning potential of language by participating in communication. Halliday (1975), in a study of his own child language acquisition, shows that the development of the formal linguistic devices for realizing basic language functions grows out of the interpersonal uses to which language is put. Because the structure of language

is itself a reflection of the functions it serves, it can be learnt through learning to communicate, and in the case of the written discourse the L_2 learner, through interaction with the printed text, gains vicarious language experiences to simulate in the real- life situations of communication. It is because the L_2 learner is similarly motivated to ' accomplish action' that a parallel can be drawn between first and second language acquisition.

Assuming that strong and adequate evidence exists to support the $L_1 = L_2$ hypothesis, we can assert that one salient feature of first language acquisition is its being unconscious. It is this feature of L_1 acquisition that we draw on and try to show that the process of second language learning is rendered, through extensive reading, unconscious similar to the process whereby the child acquires his mother tongue. At first look ,the idea does not seems to be tenable. One may even suspect a paradoxical situation when the intellectually mature adult L_2- learner is expected to approach the task of foreign language learning subconsciously. We may add that the term, ' subconscious' by no means implies being unaware of the task one is performing or of the emotions surging his heart. Rather, I use the term to imply the very trait of cognitive processes which are generally noticeable when one is deeply absorbed in doing a certain act at the expense of remaining unaware of all that may be taking place around him. The L_2 learner, too, like the child in the process of the first language acquisition, is after the printed message, decoding it subconsciously. In so doing, he often wises up to the beauties of the L_2 expressions- similes, metaphors, collocations --- etc. - and his logic and wisdom, which in comparison with those of the child learning L_1 are much more developed , hence a great advantage, aid him to expedite the rate of the learning process of L_2.

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It has been remarked that natural language discourse is not explicit,i.e. there are propositions which are not directly expressed but which may be inferred from other propositions which have been expressed. These ' missing links' coping with which constitutes part of the communicative competence of the L_2 learner, can best be taken care of, we think, by a natural approach to language acquisition, that is by getting the L_2 learner engaged in communicative interactions with comprehensible texts through extensive reading. The gist of the argument is that extensive reading activity by providing the L_2 learner with unstructured linguistic input approximates the situations in which the child picks up his mother tongue. A self- evident point in the child's language acquisition is that what the child hears is basically unstructured and what he produces is not merely an imitation of what he has heard but a great number of novel utterances triggered by the language pieces that he has heard. The child also unconsciously discovers that there is a grammatical system at work in the stream of sounds and words to which he is constantly exposed. Through wider experience, the child's utterances approximate more and more closely those of adult speakers of his speech community. The adult L_2 learner, too, exposed to unstructured linguistic input, subconsciously discovers the linguistic forms and their functions through the meaningful contexts of extensive reading materials and gradually achieves a native- like mastery of the foreign language while the impetus for the whole process is supplied by the enchantment with the learning activity itself.

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